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Marking of achievement in West Springfield High School.

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MARKING OF ACHIEVEMENT IN
WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

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MARKING OF ACHIEVEMENT
IN
WEST SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

BY
RAYMOND WALKLEY WILLIAMSON

A problem submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Science Degree

University of Massachusetts

1950

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Rudimentary marking systems have been used from earliest times. Primitive man was educated by his clan and medicine-man in the wiles of survival. If he was able to live through puberty, he was given the opportunity to show his manliness by undergoing feats of hardship and pain, usually accompanied by mutilation. The youth was awarded one of two marks; he passed and was accepted as a man by his fellows, or he failed and was relegated to the women until such time as he would become a man. The Greeks and Romans went through very much the same sort of training; however, the test came when the youth, as a soldier, went out to do battle with his father's enemies. "Return with the shield or on it" was the word which echoed through his mind as he tried his strength among men. Through the Middle Ages and the days of chivalry, feats of skill played the dominant role as to whether a man was to pass or fail. There were usually no half-way measures. Death was the award to the loser; to the victor, Life.

In the latter Middle Ages an influential middle class arose which taught the crafts through guilds, which afforded a step by step education from apprentice to master. The usual criterion for passing was the number of years it took between steps. This meant that the serious-minded boy passed from one step to another under the guidance of the master until he was free to go out on his own. The failure merely dropped to the

peasant class. The marks, here again, were either pass or fail.

That certain "schools" had been organized, dissolved, and reborn may not be dismissed, but it may be pointed out that these schools were usually the followers of a learned man or religious group. Discussions were carried on in these schools which centered around a religious or deductive problem. Students would read a prescribed book after which a debate would be formulated. The memory of the student was tested even to the quoting of long passages in the book to back the student's argument. It was not until the sixteenth century that Montaigne, the French philosopher, declared that the progress of the pupil should be judged "not by the testimony of his memory, but that of his understanding."¹

Marks at the Turn of the Twentieth Century - It has been pointed out that two distinct marks were in vogue for the centuries preceding our present era, passing and failing. With the aftermath of the Civil War came the Industrial Revolution in the United States, bringing with it the desire on the part of the populace to know just where they stood in relation to their fellow man. Passing and failing were not enough. It was noted that there appeared to be degrees of passing and degrees of failing. The answer to this desire was the percentage system, the absolute system of marking.

(1) Graves, A Student's History of Education, p. 166

How many parents of today would like to return to this old method of marking so that they could show their neighbors the number of one hundreds their children had brought home? These marks were usually subjective on the part of the teacher and really sought to show achievement which they could not rightfully do. It actually only showed the percentage of questions the teacher asked which the pupil could answer correctly. One gain had, however, been made in the awarding of marks. Horace Mann, in 1845, had argued, "We venture to predict, that the mode of examination, by printed questions and written answers will constitute a new era in the history of our schools."² It was a long step from the credo of the Greeks and Romans with their oral debates to our twentieth century, where Thorndike and his pupil, Stone, originated the standardized achievement test, but it was a step which took a long time in coming.

The Need of Marks and a Marking System - People are no longer satisfied with two marks. Higher institutions, parents, and pupils themselves object to just either passing or failing. The teacher awards the marks, but it is the administrator who uses the marks. C. C. Ross³ has divided the purposes of measurement under two headings, administrative and instructional. It is interesting to note that marks are

(2) Lee, A Guide to Measurement in Secondary Schools, p. 3

(3) Ross, Measurement in Today's Schools, p. 400

used administratively for classification, promotion, guidance, evaluation, and public relations; whereas measurement is used instructionally for motivation, practice or drill, diagnosis, and school marks. Lee⁴ uses marks to fulfill the following functions:

1. To inform the pupil of his achievement
2. To inform the parent of the pupil's achievement
3. To determine whether a pupil is to be promoted
4. To determine the graduation of a pupil
5. To encourage the pupil to study
6. To determine credits and honors.
7. To determine participation in extra-curricular activities
8. To determine whether a pupil can enter college
9. To predict the pupil's future success in secondary school or college
10. To promote competition between students
11. To indicate character development

It is evident from the above list that marks are here to stay. The problem remaining for the administrator is to find a system which will work best for the members of his faculty and the pupils and parents of the community which they serve. It is the duty of the administrator to inculcate ideas within the faculty so that they will endeavor to change the marking

(4) Lee, op cit, pp. 227-8

system to one in which they can truly believe and to which they can give adequate defense. Above all, the mark should mean the same thing to all teachers using it.

The Marking System in West Springfield, Massachusetts -

The marking system of West Springfield is the culmination of years of study. Nine objectives are cited which agree with the list of Lee; the prime emphasis upon analyzing and rating each individual on his own merits, and consideration of the "Whole Child" being the most essential.

The system of marks is "A" achievement at a level one year above his grade; "B" achievement at grade; "C" achievement one year below grade; "X" borderline - if a final mark, it equals one half credit; "F" achievement two years below grade level or failure. At the end of any marking period or year, the following procedure is recommended:

				<u>Resultant Averages</u>			
Each	A	counts	5	From 4.5 to 5.0	equals	A	
	B	"	4	3.6 to 4.5	"	B	
	C	"	3	2.6 to 3.5	"	C	
	X	"	2	2.0 to 2.5	"	X	
	F	"	1	1.0 to 2.0	"	F	

This means that the resultant average may not be a true average.

Also during the year a double mark is used to show direction of the pupil's progress. Thus an AB shows that an "A" student mark is sliding, whereas a CB shows that a "C" pupil is pulling himself up by his bootstraps. In addition to the double mark is an attitude mark from one to four which cor-

responds to the achievement mark in interpretation.

To aid the pupil a warning card is sent to the parents of any child not working up to capacity. A record of this warning is made, and no pupil may be failed for the term unless a warning card has been presented for the parents' inspection and signature.

To aid the teacher in properly distributing his marks, in January of each year an analysis of numbers and percentages of marks for the second marking period is supplied by the office of the superintendent. This analysis is used as a guide only and will tend to keep corresponding marks in the entire system somewhat in line.

One of the chief basis for term marks is the terminal test. This test counts one tenth of the mark for the term, while any test covering a half year counts one third. This always means that the regular daily work counts from two thirds to nine tenths of the mark for any one period.

At the end of each year final averages are determined as explained above. Pupils who fail one academic subject normally are given a trial to the next grade for two months. Pupils who are three years above age-grade level are normally transferred to the next grade. Pupils who fail two or more academic subjects are expected to repeat the grade. Promotion in the secondary school is by credits, twenty credits per year in each grade, with one credit per year in citizenship. A Senior High School diploma is awarded upon satisfac-

tory completion of sixty-three credits, three of which are for citizenship.

In this whole marking system, whatever administrative details or regulations are set up, the matter of paramount importance is the "Best interests of the child."

CHAPTER II

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OUTLINE OF PROCEDURE

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OUTLINE OF PROCEDURE

The progressive school system is interested in evaluating its progress regularly. It seeks to find new trends in administration and teaching. It intends to study, evaluate, and finally put into practice worthwhile ideas which may better the schools of its community in some way.

Statement of the Problem - West Springfield High School is not satisfied with its present marking system. There seem to be inadequacies which, upon careful study, may be corrected. The problem of school marks thus evolves around three major questions: 1) What symbols are used in current practice to denote levels of pupil achievement; 2) How is the mark assigned the pupil arrived at; and 3) How does a mark explain the total picture of the pupil's achievement?

General Procedure - As the schools of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had their beginnings on common ground, it was deemed advisable to send a questionnaire to each of the secondary schools in the Commonwealth to find what they had done toward solving the marking problem in their schools. Upon return of a sufficient number of these questionnaires, tabulations would be drawn up according to school location (rural or urban) and pupil enrollment. Comparisons would then be drawn between West Springfield High School and schools of similar size and location; and schools not comparable would be studied to learn their solutions to the problem. All findings would be analyzed in accord with the theo-

ries and findings of authorities in the field of marking. This done, the conclusions of the study would be analyzed in the light of practicability in the West Springfield community. It would then follow that recommendations would be offered the superintendent to make certain revisions in the present marking system to clarify any inadequacies which could be clarified.

CHAPTER III

MARKING SYSTEMS IN CURRENT USE

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MARKING SYSTEMS IN CURRENT USE

The questionnaire was sent to the two hundred and fifty secondary schools of the Commonwealth from which were returned one hundred and ninety-four of sufficient completeness to be considered in this study. Of the seventy-eight per cent received some administrators chose to omit certain items while concentrating upon some other items which seemed to them to be a problem in which they had deep interest. The problem of rural or urban location was left to the administrator to define and no attempt was made to limit the definition by statistical enumeration of population.

Symbols Used in Current Practice to Denote Levels of Pupil Achievement - The study has brought forth the fact that seventeen different systems of marking are used in the Commonwealth. This number is further increased by modifications and the use of plus or minus marks, and in some instances, both. The findings within schools of five hundred or more pupil enrollment in comparison with the total picture of schools in the Commonwealth are shown in Table I. It is noted that the marking of pupil achievement according to the percentage system is used only four per cent in schools of five hundred enrollment or more, and in only five per cent over the state as a whole. This seems to be in keeping with the study of recent experts who point out that "such a system attempts a degree of refinement in educational measurement that is impossible of attainment today with the instruments

available. In recent years there has been a definite trend away from the percentage system."¹ However, there seem to be schools which are reluctant to give up the percentage system. Table I markedly shows this age-old antipathy.

Table I

General System of Marking Achievement in Secondary Schools of Five Hundred or More Enrollment

System Used	Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
Percentage Number	4	4	5
Percentage Number on Record Card	14	15	14
Four Letter	10	8	6
Five Letter	53	56	45
Six Letter	33	32	44
Plus or Minus Letter Modification	29	28	38

There are fourteen to fifteen per cent who award letter marks on pupils' report cards, yet keep a percentage mark on

(1) Ross, Measurement in Today's Schools, p. 408

the office administrative records. This would seem to indicate that about one fifth of the secondary schools of the state use percentage marks to all intents and purposes, although this use is cloaked by the use of letter marks on report cards. This reticence on the part of schools to use the letter mark throughout is also exhibited when the marking system is given numerical equivalents according to the old-fashioned percentage system. That is to say, an "A" means from ninety to one hundred per cent, a "B" from eighty to eighty-nine per cent, etc.

It may also be seen from Table I that of the letter systems of marking, the five letter system is used in over half of the schools enrolling five hundred or more pupils. Taking the total picture, it would appear that the smaller schools do not follow the same percentage, as a drop of eleven per cent is shown in that column, the increase appearing in the six letter system. It would follow that a system of less than five marks would lead to generalities which would harm any effort to guide the pupil in subsequent educational or vocational work. A system of more than six marks begins to become unwieldy. The use of plus or minus marks to stand for partial achievement in a grade tends to return us to the percentage system, and what teacher can be precise?²

(2) Edmonson, Roemer. Bacon, The Administration of the Modern Secondary School, p. 459

The Passing Mark - The passing mark has come under great scrutiny on the part of administrators who see the competitive marking system cause the pupils of lesser ability to leave school. In a system of passing or failing which centers about the subject rather than the pupil, some pupils who are trying hard to succeed do not find success and are soon discouraged. Ultimately, they leave school without graduating.

There seem to be two ways of determining promotion of a pupil. One way has already been alluded to, the degree to which a pupil has mastered the content of the course. The second way is to determine the extent to which the pupil has mastered the course commensurate with his ability.

In an effort to find out whether the schools of the Commonwealth are endeavoring to be pupil-minded or subject or curriculum-minded, a question on the check list was "What is the passing mark in achievement?" Answers to be checked were given in percentages from sixty to seventy-five, but one space was left as "Other." The results are shown in Table II on page seventeen. It may be seen that about one-fifth of the schools of five hundred and more pupil enrollment are pupil-minded, which is six per cent more than the state as a whole.

Comments attending this question showed that, even though certain schools were still clinging to the percentage mark for passing, some adjustments were trying to be made to compromise the situation. It was found that some schools

allowed half credit for a mark in the sixties, whereas seventy was full credit. Certain other schools permitted full credit for sixty-five, but would not allow a pupil to continue with the next advanced course in that subject. One school even reported that each year a pupil was allowed to have full credit for one "D" (in the sixties) as long as the other three marks were "C" (in the seventies) or better.

Table II

Schools with Five Hundred or More Pupil Enrollment
Having Various Passing Marks

Passing Mark	Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
60	28	30	27
65	19	18	16
70	32	32	43
Other (Letter)	21	20	14

A summation of information found in Tables I and II shows that although only four to five per cent of the schools admit the use of the percentage system and an additional fourteen to fifteen per cent admit a dual system of letter marks on report cards and percentage marks on office records,

that actually only twenty to twenty-one per cent of the schools with over five hundred pupil enrollment and only fourteen per cent of the state as a whole use a straight letter system unencumbered with percentages.

The Meaning of a Mark - Marking systems within the scope of this study are shown on Table III.

Table III

The Number of Various Marking Systems in One Hundred and Ninety-three of the Secondary Schools of Massachusetts

Marking System	Number	Marking System	Number
Percentage	12	ABCED	1
ABCD	8	ABCLD	3
ABCF	1	ABCXD	2
HCPU	2	ABDXF	1
ABCDE	41	ECFPU	2
ABCDF	31	EGF 74 70	1
ABCDX	2	12345	2
ABCDEF	81	EVGFRU	1
EGFPUD	2		

It is evident that if a letter mark cannot be another

name for a percentage mark, some other meaning must be given to it. Maxwell and Reusser have stated, "A school mark and the marking system in use in any particular school are essentially matters of definition - a mark means what it is defined to mean."³ The meaning, whatever it may be, should come from within the system and have definite meaning for all those who will come in contact with it.

It may be seen that the single most common system is the six letter ABCDEF which comprises approximately forty-two per cent of the total. At times it would seem that too elaborate definitions are assigned these individual letters. One report received with the questionnaire contained a two page explanation of the marking system. Still another return included a printed form which was sent to every parent to explain the system of that school. If too much is attached to the marking system by way of explanation, it tends to confuse the teacher who tries to match the pupil to this yardstick as well as the parent who tries to understand how the pupil fits the picture designated by the mark. The mark is, for the best part, highly subjective and theoretically unsound.⁴

Probably those definitions which take only a word or phrase of explanation, such as "A" - Superior, "B" - Above

(3) Maxwell and Reusser, Observation and Directed Teaching in Secondary Schools, p. 378

(4) Ross, op cit., p. 409

average, etc., which also carry in a sentence or two what recommendations the school will write for a pupil obtaining such a mark are the most practical, efficient and justifiable.

CHAPTER IV

HOW MARKS ARE ASSIGNED

CHAPTER IV

HOW MARKS ARE AWARDED

In the preceding chapter the various systems of marking were shown. We have two questions remaining, how is the individual pupil awarded his mark, and how does the mark describe the pupil's total achievement. It is the purpose of this chapter to answer the first of these questions.

Subjectivity Versus Objectivity in Awarding Marks — It has been pointed out by countless experiments and studies that subjectivity in determining marks makes for a very high degree of unreliability.¹ We realize that written records are more reliable than memory, written work more dependable than oral when it comes time to evaluate and mark. It was surprising to find in this study that only six per cent of the total schools taking part used objective means solely for determining a mark. Ninety-two per cent reported that they used both subjective and objective methods of determining marks.

Elements to Consider in Determining a Pupil's Mark — It had been found in several studies that teachers considered many elements in determining a pupil's mark.² It was therefore decided to see what elements the schools of the Commonwealth

(1) Ross, Measurement in Today's Schools, pp. 44-49
and
Reeder, The Fundamentals of Public School Administration, pp. 578-79

(2) Edmonson, Roemer, Bacon, The Administration of the Modern Secondary School, pp. 461-62

considered. Administrators receiving the questionnaire were asked to select the five most important elements. Table IV shows the elements used in determining a pupil's mark in schools of five hundred or more enrollment as compared to the statewide percentage. It is interesting to note that from a

Table IV

Elements to be Considered in Determining a Pupil's Mark
in Schools of Five Hundred or More Enrollment.

Element	Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
Achievement	83	82	79
Attitude	25	25	24
Effort	36	36	44
Quality of Work	33	32	32
Term Tests	31	29	25

list of fifty-four items, the five elements shown in Table IV held the same rank and nearly the same percentages throughout. That achievement ranks first in the table is not surprising as many authors have instilled the truth that no matter how worthy another element may be, the true mark is based on achievement.³

Quality of work and Term Tests which ranked third and fourth respectively in the table are means and methods of measuring achievement. The ideal set-up would have been one hundred per cent for achievement followed by such things as tests, quizzes, examinations, etc. which would have shown degrees of progress toward total achievement. A discussion in greater detail concerning such things as attitude and effort will be taken up in a later chapter.

How Pupil Progress is Determined — It has been pointed out that seventy-nine per cent of the schools of the Commonwealth believe achievement to be the major element to be considered in determining a pupil's mark. (Table IV) It is important to learn how progress in this achievement is recognized by the schools. With this in mind one question on the check list was asked which was intended to find whether achievement was compared to the ability of the pupil, his previous record, his group, or a combination of two or more of the above. The results are shown in Table V on page twenty-four.

It may be seen that the pupil's achievement is not only compared to his ability, but also to the average of the group of which he is a member. Individually speaking, the proponents of that school of thought which believe that the pupil must be pitted against himself alone and that competition among pupils is educationally bad are approximately the same

proportion as those which believe that a pupil's progress should not be confined to his ability at all because it will lead to unnatural adjustment in life situations, but that the pupil should meet that everyday competition and take his place naturally in a cold and critical world.

Table V

Various Means of Determining Pupil Progress in Schools with Five Hundred or More Enrollment.

Means of Comparison	Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
a. Ability of Pupil	13	15	20
b. Average of Group	16	15	20
c. Pupil's Previous Record	5	4	4
d. Both a. and b.	39	39	39
e. Both a. and c.	11	12	6
f. Both b. and c.	5	4	3
g. a., b., and c.	2	2	4
h. Other	8	9	4

It may also be noted that a very small proportion of schools have not confined the pupil's record to guidance or a statement of where the pupil has been, but have used this rather

outmoded, and therefore rather poor, standard, as a yardstick to rate the pupil's present progress.

When the ability of the pupil is used in conjunction with the average of the pupil's group to determine progress, it would mean that homogeneous grouping is being practiced. Several ways have been found to determine when a pupil is doing satisfactory or unsatisfactory work in relation to his ability.⁴ The use of homogeneous grouping would insure a fair degree of competition, and the pupil would be with a group of the same native ability, which would show him that success was obtainable if he would use his ability to best advantage. One suggestion would be to rate the pupil failing only when his achievement falls one full year behind his intelligence. Even then, all cases of failure should be studied before an unsatisfactory mark was awarded because certain factors may have taken part of which the teacher knew nothing.

The use of the normal probability curve is claimed by many authorities to be the only scientific way of determining a pupil's progress.⁵ The major drawback to this system is that some administrators demand that the curve be followed to the letter instead of being used as an overall guide. When the question was asked of the school administrators in the Commonwealth whether the curve was used, sixty-eight per

(4) Ross, op. cit., pp. 412-13

(5) Ibid., p. 409
and
Lee, op. cit., pp. 239-42

cent declared a definite "No". The remainder of the schools use the curve as an overall guide, which is as it should be.

CHAPTER V

MARKS AND THE TOTAL PUPIL

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MARKS AND THE TOTAL PUPIL

Having determined what school marks are supposed to represent achievement, and having decided upon the system to show that achievement, it remains a task to learn how the final mark represents the total picture of the pupil.

Attitudes and Achievement - Countless teachers believe that industry, effort, and behavior should be integrated with achievement in determining a pupil's total picture. Needless to say, such things are important, perhaps more important than information and skills. However, there is the danger that a combination of the more objective achievement and the subjective intangibles may be misleading to the observer and give a false picture of the pupil. How can, then, a mark show a true picture? It was asked on the questionnaire: "Are sub numbers or letters used with achievement marks to denote attitudes toward subject matter?" In schools of five hundred or more enrollment the answer was two to one, "No." Over the state as a whole, however, the picture changed. Forty-three per cent said, "Yes."

Analysis of the replies indicates that two systems for marking attitudes are in use in the Commonwealth. Those schools using sub numbers or letters are allowing each teacher to rate each pupil in his subject. This means that any clash of personalities, or ideas of favoritism, may be

identified with the teacher by the pupil, or his friends, and prove detrimental to the teacher and pupil alike. This also means that a separate mark for citizenship, or some like term, may or may not be given. In those schools where no sub number or letter is used it would seem that the various attitudes are treated as separate subjects and listed as far as the objectives of the schools permit. Then, once or more times a year a subjective rating for each of those intangibles is made for each pupil by every teacher familiar with him, to the end that a composite picture is presented to interested parties concerned. No individual personalities come into focus, which is as it should be.¹ In any case, teachers should have defined for them by general consensus just what the objectives are and how they shall be rated.

Marks to Denote Change in Progress - As a further check on the progress of a pupil, some schools find it advisable to use a sub letter or number to denote whether a pupil is progressing satisfactorily or is back-sliding. To find what the general practice was, the questionnaire contained an item to that effect. The result showed that ninety per cent relied solely on warning cards or other methods to show progress. Warning cards were of two kinds. The most general type was sent to the home at mid-term. This report was for

(1) Edmonson, Roemer, and Bacon, The Administration of the Modern Secondary School, pp. 462-63

the purpose of showing the parent any improvement in the pupil's work or any tendency on the part of the pupil to let school subjects slip. The second type of warning card served as a supplement to the report card and accompanied the report card to the home. Its purpose was to clarify the mark awarded the pupil by specifying the factors involved in the progress of the pupil. These warning cards are all made a part of the permanent record of the pupil and serve as anecdotal records for the administration.

Double Marks for Integrated Achievement - The dictum that every teacher is an English teacher has led some into awarding double marks for achievement in subject matter courses other than English. While it is commendable to check written expression in other courses than English, the use of a double mark should not count toward the achievement mark in that subject. Of course, it is to be presumed that spelling and vocabulary of the course should be part of the subject learning, but written expression and grammar should be left to the English department as far as achievement marking is concerned. This study brought forth the fact that five per cent of the schools of Massachusetts do use a double mark. This would indicate that skills and information which cannot be expressed well are of less value to the pupil than those which may be clearly stated and written. The problem is worthy of more consideration and research than is here given.

The Mark for the Course - Marks throughout the year, which may be issued every eight or ten weeks, show the progress of the pupil toward the objectives set up by the pupils and teacher. In the final analysis, however, the pupil, his parents, the administration, and any interested employer or admissions officer merely wants to know - what is the final mark? Where does the pupil stand with respect to the rest of his class?

This problem warrants a great deal of thought on the part of the teacher and the administration because of that importance. It is plainly evident that a descending series of marks in a subject field is not as good as an ascending series; especially in subjects which require a cumulative learning process. On the other hand, it would not seem fair to fail a pupil because he did not achieve the standards required for a portion of the course. To find what the schools of Massachusetts were doing along this line three questions were asked: "Are final marks determined by equally rating each quarter; Are final marks determined by shifting the emphasis to marks acquired in later quarters of the school year; and Are superior students exempted from examinations at the close of the year?" Table VI shows the percentage of schools with five hundred or more enrollment who were awarded marks as determined by the first two questions above. From these percentages it can be assumed that the answerer of the question in some few cases counter-

manded himself by agreeing with both methods. It is therefore possible that a dual system of awarding marks is used which is the combination of the two ideas mentioned above.

Table VI

Various Methods of Reaching Final Marks in Schools of Five Hundred or More Enrollment

Method		Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
Equally Rating Marking Periods	Yes	60	61	67
	No	39	38	30
	Sometimes	1	1	3
Shifting Emphasis to Later Marking Periods	Yes	43	40	27
	No	57	57	69
	Sometimes	--	3	4

It is interesting to note that the schools with over five hundred enrollment, although comprising approximately forty per cent of the total number of schools in the Commonwealth, are in approximately the same ratio in the tables as the total. The table shows that equally rating the marking period marks is in current vogue.

The Place of Final Examination in Determining the Final Mark - One of the things to be taken into consideration for determining the final mark has been the final examination. This examination is used to test all the important phases of a course, which should be done as accurately as possible.

Table VII

Percentage of Schools of Five Hundred or More Enrollment Who Exempt Superior Students from Final Examinations

School Examination Policy	Per Cent of Urban	Per Cent of Urban - Rural	Per Cent of Total Schools
Pupils Exempted	22	24	23
Pupils Not Exempted	56	66	63
No Final Examination	21	8	11
Other Policy	1	2	3

The knowledge on the part of the pupils that there is to be a final test on the course has proven to be a stimulus for the pupil to study. Studies have proven that pupils informed of such a test have done much better than pupils who had no previous information that such a test was forthcoming.²

(2) Lee, A Guide to Measurement in Secondary Schools, p. 327

As final examinations are considered by very many schools to be an essential part of the school teaching program, a question was asked as to whether superior students were exempted from taking these tests at the end of the year. This is shown in Table VII. The arguments for and against exemption from examinations by the brighter pupils is ably summed up by Edmonson,³ and authorities generally are in agreement that all pupils should be measured; there should be no exemptions from the taking of final examinations.⁴

The minute percentage of schools which follows a semi-exemption policy is interesting to note. One school in the Commonwealth has examinations at the end of the year for just college preparatory pupils; three schools require all pupils to take final examinations except seniors. A bit of speculation might be used in considering what these four schools have done to solve the problem of exemption or no exemption.

(3) Edmonson, Roemer, and Bacon, op cit., p. 457

(4) Maxwell and Reusser, Observation and Directed Teaching in Secondary Schools, p. 353

CHAPTER VI

RESTATEMENT OF PROBLEM, CONCLUSIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

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RESTATEMENT OF PROBLEM, CONCLUSIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

"West Springfield Schools are Schools of Growth" is the motto of the West Springfield, Massachusetts School system. This is a dynamic motto which means that the schools' faculties and administrators are always seeking improvement through re-evaluation of the philosophy and procedures of the system. Periodic checking on the various phases of teaching and administration will indicate places where improvement is necessary.

Restatement of the Problem — As evaluation is a continuous process, the marking system has come under surveillance. West Springfield wants to look into its marking system to see if it should be revised or altered. Questions arise as to whether or not the system should use the same symbols for marks, final examinations and percentage grades or plus or minus marks. As it is impossible to cover all loop-holes, agree with all authorities, and therefore maintain a perfect system for marking, it is decided to find out what other schools in the Commonwealth have done to meet the problem. After weighing the answers received, the practicability of use in West Springfield of the better ideas which conform to the philosophy of the system as it now exists will be studied. In short, the purpose of this study is to learn what systems of marking are now in vogue in the state, how administrators and teachers

arrived at the mark assigned the pupil, and how the mark explained the total picture of the pupil's achievement.

Conclusions Drawn from Other Schools — The study shows that the five-letter system of marking ranked first in the Commonwealth followed closely by the six-letter system, with the percentage-number system coming last. Upon questioning the schools concerning the passing mark, however, it was revealed that, although ninety-five per cent of the schools claimed to use the letter system, they thought in terms of percentages, as the percentage who used a letter mark for passing proved to be only fourteen per cent. Plus or minus letters are used by thirty-eight per cent of the schools and then usually to denote a borderline passing mark.

Achievement, effort, quality of work, term tests, and attitude were listed in that order as the five most important elements to be considered in determining a pupil's mark. Ninety-two per cent of the replies showed that these elements were determined and marked using both subjective and objective methods.

Seventy-nine per cent of the schools declared that pupil progress was determined by either comparison to the ability of the individual pupil or to the average of the pupil's group, or both; only sixty-eight per cent did not use some form of the normal probability curve as a basis for marking.

In denoting attitude toward subject matter, forty-three per cent of the schools reported yes, but when asked if sub numbers or letters were used to denote change in progress of the pupil, only ten per cent said yes. Only five per cent of the schools replied yes to the question whether double marks were awarded in integrated subjects, one mark for content or achievement, the other for grammar or written expression.

It was found that when it came to the awarding of a final mark, sixty-nine per cent of the schools rated each marking period equally. Of the thirty-one per cent remaining, twenty-eight per cent shifted the emphasis to later marking periods in the year. The remaining three per cent left the final mark up to the teacher's judgment.

In eighty-six per cent of the schools of the Commonwealth final examinations are given as an integral part of the measuring program. However, in twenty-three per cent of these schools pupils falling into certain specified categories may be exempted from taking the examination by either teacher discretion or school policy.

Areas of disagreement — The use of the normal probability curve seems to be the center of major controversy in the determining of pupil marks. Authorities insist that studies have proven that the curve is essential to a sound marking technique. It is pointed out that ten different distributions have been defended by prominent educators in

the field of marking. All systems have their merits although that of Cajori is most widely used.¹

Practice varies in three ways. Some schools think of a mark as representing a pupil in the rank of the class of which he is a member. Other schools think of the mark as ranking the pupil in relation to pupils in general of the same age or grade. This is the manner in which West Springfield uses the curve. C. C. Ross believes the third manner of thinking is best; that is, the pupil should be ranked in the school or system of which he is a member.²

It must be made quite clear that because a pupil falls into the lowest per cent of a typical group in his school he has not necessarily failed. "Failure depends upon the promotional policy of the school and upon the teacher's educational philosophy."³ According to authority, then, a passing mark cannot be "70" as advocated by forty-three per cent of the schools of the Commonwealth. Failure is an area with no specific boundaries.

Limitations and Recommendations - Results of this study show that the marking system in West Springfield, Massachusetts should be revised if the system is to adhere to its motto: "West Springfield Schools are Schools of Growth."

(1) Ross, Measurement in Today's Schools, p. 409

(2) Ibid., p. 410

(3) Ibid., p. 411

The five letter system of marking is adequate without recourse to plus or minus marks. The percentage system used in conjunction with the letter system should be rejected, as it is a return to the outmoded absolute percentage system.

The use of distribution of marks throughout the school or system should be maintained in accordance with the advice of experts. The use of grade level as a criterion for ranking should be discontinued.

In determining the total picture of the pupil, the use of sub letters to denote direction of progress, and the use of sub numbers to denote attitude toward the subject should be replaced with a written series of objectives in keeping with school philosophy which should hold a similar place in importance to the subject-matter fields. These intangible objectives which would be rated subjectively and individually by teachers would appear in a composite mark on all records and reports. It would also be deemed advisable that, in addition to a warning card sent to the parent at mid-term, a supplementary explanation card should accompany the report card home when advisable.

The final recommendation would be to reinstitute the final examination as an integral part of the measurement program. There seems to be no real basis for omitting this very important evaluation device.

Method of Bringing About Necessary Changes — The

background for this study has left in the mind of the author a definite procedure for bringing about wholesome changes in the marking system.

1. The faculty should reach a common understanding as to why marks are awarded and what they mean.
2. Emphasis should be placed on the idea that only achievement is a basis for marking.
3. The use of the normal probability curve as an overall guide to teachers' marks should be demonstrated as scientifically correct.
4. It must be shown that a pupil should learn socially as well as bookishly, that education is life, not preparation for life.
5. Teachers should keep in mind that a pupil's native ability, present achievement, and rate of progress are separate and individual matters.
6. Lastly, the mark which will follow the pupil all the days of his life must be as accurate a picture of that pupil as possible. Special reports and anecdotal records must be used to clarify the mark to any one concerned.

APPENDICES

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

CHECK LIST QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

31 Fruwirth Avenue
Feeding Hills, Massachusetts
January 31, 1950

To the Principal:

Uniform and accurate marking has been the basis for much discussion among teachers and administrators for many years. With this in mind the enclosed check list questionnaire has been prepared to ascertain the manner in which your school has met this problem.

The purpose of this check list is to seek the actual methods of marking in the public secondary schools throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in order to determine whether the present achievement marking system in the West Springfield High School should be retained or revised.

Realizing that this check list does not contain all possibilities, it is hoped that you will feel free to comment on any phrase of marking which would better explain your solution of the problem.

This study is being undertaken through the Department of Education of the University of Massachusetts as a partial requirement for the Degree of Master of Science. It is hoped that you will consider this problem to be one which is worthy of a portion of your time to assist; so that the study may be completed for publication this spring.

Very truly yours,

APPENDIX B

A CHECK LIST QUESTIONNAIRE OF ACHIEVEMENT GRADING SYSTEMS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Please fill in school name and city or town for question one, and check the remainder of the questions in the proper space.

Any comments, questions, or statements you may wish to make will be sincerely appreciated.

1. School Name _____ Address _____
2. Location: Rural () Urban ()
3. Enrollment: Under 100 () 100-250 () 250-500 ()
Over 500 ()
4. What is the system for grading achievement?

Percentage number	()
Letter: A B C D E F	()
E G F P U D	()
Honors Satisfactory Unsatisfactory	()
Satisfactory Unsatisfactory	()
Other _____	()
5. Are plus and minus letter grades used? Yes () No ()
6. What is the passing grade in achievements? 60 ()
65 () 70 () 75 () Other _____ ()
7. How are achievement grades determined? Subjectively ()
Objectively () Both subjectively and objectively ()
8. How is pupil progress determined?
 - a. Compared to the ability of the individual pupil ()
 - b. Compared to the average of the pupil's group ()
 - c. Compared to the pupil's previous record ()
 - d. Combination of _____ and _____ ()
 - e. Other _____ ()
9. Is normal probability curve used as a basis for grading? Yes () No ()

10. Check the five elements you consider most important in determining a pupil's grade.

Industry	()	Quantity of accomplishment	()
Make-up	()	Amount of preparation	()
Effort	()	Relative standing in class	()
Character	()	Degree of correctness	()
Initiative	()	Use of right steps	()
Attention	()	Achievement	()
Attitude	()	Accuracy	()
Neatness	()	Order	()
Speed	()	Correct use of principles	()
Personality	()	Capacity	()
Originality	()	Quality of voice	()
Health	()	Facility of speech	()
Vocabulary	()	General ability	()
Reputation	()	Daily oral work	()
Grammar	()	Activities	()
Spelling	()	Final examination	()
Disposition	()	Handwriting	()
Rumors	()	Home conditions	()
Conduct	()	Reasoning power	()
Written work	()	Unassigned work	()
Memory	()	Outside work	()
Library work	()	Understanding	()
Punctuality	()	Quality of work	()
Daily quiz	()	Final accomplishment	()
Absence	()	Degree of interest	()
Term tests	()	Rate of improvement	()
Intelligence	()	Special report	()

11. Are sub numbers or letters used with achievement grades to denote attitude toward subject matter?
Yes () No ()

12. Are sub numbers or letters used with achievement grades to denote change in progress of student?
Yes () No ()

13. In subject fields are double grades awarded - one for content or achievement, the other for grammar or written expression?
Yes () No ()

14. Are final grades determined by equally rating each quarter?
Yes () No ()

15. Are final grades determined by shifting the emphasis to grades acquired in later quarters of the school year?
Yes () No ()

16. Are superior students exempted from examinations at the close of the year? Yes () No ()
a. By school custom Yes () No ()
b. By teacher discretion Yes () No ()
c. Other _____
17. I would like a copy of the findings of this study. Yes () No ()
18. Name of the person answering this questionnaire. _____

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May 26, 1950

